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ECA Update: July 28, 2016

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Upcoming Events

2016 National Cleanup Workshop

Visit cleanupworkshop.com

August 2016

9-10

Third Annual Intermountain

The July 2016 Bulletin has been released. Included is the agenda for the 2016 National Cleanup Workshop and other stories:

- ECA Members Comment at DOE Public Meeting on Consent-Based Siting
- Update on Reorganization from EM Leadership
- Regional Coalition of LANL Communities to EM: Improve Community Outreach
- WIPP Asks NM for Permit Changes Crucial to Restart Operations
- Bill Introduced to Provide to Local Governments Hosting Stranded Spent Nuclear Fuel

To read, click the link above or here.

Savannah River board votes to officially oppose accepting German spent nuclear fuel

The Augusta Chronicle

July 26, 2016

NEW ELLENTON — The Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board is not in favor of accepting spent nuclear fuel from Germany.

In two separate votes Tuesday, the group voted down a draft recommendation to accept the spent fuel and endorsed a draft position statement that opposes receiving the spent fuel for treatment and storage in the U.S.

The spent fuel, which comes from two German reactors that have ceased operations, originated in the U.S.

It takes the form of about one million graphite spheres that contain uranium and thorium and are currently stored in 455 casks.

Energy Summit
Idaho Falls, ID
Visit website

September 2016

14

Save the Date: House Nuclear Cleanup Caucus Capitol Hill

November 2016

16-18

INVITATION ONLY
Save the Date: 2016 Intergovernmental Meeting
New Orleans, LA

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Gil Allensworth, board member and draft recommendation manager, said before the vote that he didn't want any more nuclear waste at SRS, but was concerned about it falling into the wrong hands.

"If one of these balls gets in the water supply of Paris, that scares me," Allensworth said. "I believe we are the best place in the world to keep this stuff."

The draft recommendation failed to pass, getting only six votes in favor. Eleven board members voted against, and one abstained.

The position statement, which opposed receiving the spent fuel, was voted on next. It passed 13 to five.

The board also voted in favor of a position statement that opposes the storage of commercial spent nuclear fuel and high level radioactive waste atSRS until 2048 or longer.

Tom Clements, the director of nuclear watchdog group SRS Watch, was pleased with the outcome of the votes.

"I thought it was quite strange that they allowed the two positions that had opposite statements to get this far," Clements said. "I think they should have resolved this in the committee and presented one unified statement and not two."

Clements said that a final Environmental Assessment from the Department of Energy is pending on the German spent nuclear fuel issue. He said it was supposed to be released in June but now there is no timetable.

"I personally think part of the reason for that is what's happening in Germany, both the terrorism issue, and that there may be hesitancy to pay more to Savannah River National Laboratory for a program they don't think is going to go forward."

What bottles, cans and nuclear material have in common

The Aiken Standard
July 27, 2016

BY TIM ECHOLS
Georgia Public Service Commissioner

We put newspapers, water bottles, aluminum cans and all sorts of plastics on the curb in front of our house each week because it extends the life of our landfills saving us all money.

It also is the right thing to do. But when it comes to the used nuclear fuel from our commercial reactors, our long-range plan is simply to bury it. That has been our policy for decades, but changing the policy may be something the next president can bring about.

We have in this country more than 70,000 tons of used fuel stored at more than 75 sites in 33 states, and the U.S.' 100 commercial reactors produce about 2,000 additional tons of used fuel each year.

Because we don't recycle this nuclear material, it would take nine Yucca Mountain repositories by the turn of the next century to house all of the used fuel being produced.

Getting one Yucca has proved daunting, let alone nine. In the meantime, Georgia and South Carolina ratepayers spend hundreds of millions of dollars to let the material sit in highly engineered casks and pools at plant sites.

And these have to be replaced every 100 years – for about 1 million years. Definitely not sustainable.

Starting in 1990, the French did what the U.S. backed away from – they built a commercial recycling plant for used nuclear fuel.

They took the uranium-filled fuel rods and figured out how to safely reuse 96 percent of the material. By separating the uranium and plutonium from the fission products, they take advantage of all of the energy left in the material.

More importantly, they turnthe remaining 4 percent of waste into an inert glass product that requires minimum security and safeguard protocols. If we didthat here in the United States, it would significantly reduce potential waste going into a Yucca Mountain and extend the facility's life.

So how is it that the U.S. would not want to do the same? Georgia Tech Professor of Nuclear Engineering Nolan E. Hertel, a renowned expert, notes that one result of the ban on nuclear recycling by President Jimmy Carter, meant to prevent nuclear proliferation, is more than 2,400 tons of nuclear waste being stored on-site in Georgia.

In my opinion, the time has come for the nuclear energy industry to go green and make the electricity it generates even more sustainable. We need to demonstrate the value of linking nuclear baseload and intermittent wind and solar.

Here is how we can do it.

First, let's recognize the energy value of the used nuclear fuel we currently discard. Did you know that our 70,000 tons of used fuel contains roughly enough energy to power every household in American for 12 years?

"Valuing used fuel against the cost of permanent burial is a calculation best done by the companies that provide fuel management services," said Jack Spencer, of the Heritage Foundation. "Right now, utilities have no incentive to do anything but store it."

This would require Congress to act. Second, complete the federal construction project known as the MOX project, or Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility,at the Savannah River Site near Aiken.

This plant, modeled after processes currently used in France at La Hague and MELOX, will permanently change surplus nuclear warhead material into commercial nuclear reactor fuel.

This reactor fuel could be used across the river at Georgia's Plant Vogtle reactors with some modifications.

The MOX Project facility is 70 percent complete, but haphazard funding from Washington is dragging out the project. We need presidential support for this funding.

Third, recycling used nuclear fuel makes sense in the long run. This recycled material will be available at a discounted price compared to fresh uranium fuel the utilities currently buy.

Ratepayers and shareholders will benefit from cheaper reactor fuel, especially in times like today when low natural gas prices are creating a financial disadvantage for nuclear plants. The cost of nine Yucca Mountains will be astronomical, and recycling drastically reduces storage for the remaining 4 percent of used fuel.

Finally, let's do the math. If we continue to close coal plants, which operate around the clock regardless of weather, and we continue to add intermittent energy sources like wind and solar and their natural gas backup generators, how are we going to reduce our net CO2 emissions and provide the reliability that businesses and ratepayers expect? Nuclear energy is the answer, and recycling makes it greener and sustainable.

Tim Echols regulates energy for Georgia and was recently representing the United States at the World Nuclear Exhibition. He wrote this article after touring the MELOX MOX facility in Southern France.

Clock ticking on decision for Oak Ridge nuke dump

Knoxville News Sentinel

July 28, 2016

OAK RIDGE — While the need for it is years down the road, the U.S. Department of Energy is on a tight schedule to decide where on its Oak Ridge Reservation to put a new landfill for low-level radioactive waste.

"It sounds like eight years is a long time away, but it's not that long," Sue Cange, manager of the DOE's office of environmental management, told attendees at an informational session Wednesday afternoon.

She said it will take several years to get the requisite approval from state and federal regulators and to design and build the dump, estimated to cost in the low $700 million range over the span of its 50-year life cycle.

Another option — to send the debris by truck or train to nuclear waste storage sites out West — would cost about $800 million more. Cange said that option would likely slow down the ongoing cleanup in Oak Ridge, which is still expected to take decades.

Wherever the new dump is located, it will have to be monitored "in perpetuity," Cange and fellow DOE executive Brian Henry said.

DOE officials say the new landfill is needed for the DOE's multibillion dollar cleanup of the toxic nuclear legacy from the Manhattan Project to build the first atomic bomb and the Cold War nuclear arms race.

Four sites west of the Y-12 National Security Complex, a nuclear weapons plant in Bear Creek Valley, are under consideration out of 16 possible locations that were earlier studied.

The Bear Creek Valley sites are deemed the best available on the 35,000-acre Oak Ridge Reservation and are near a haul road that was built specifically to bring debris to an existing nuke landfill.

All four options are within a mile of Oak Ridge residences. Henry said those homes are separated from the sites by a "prominent ridge that serves as an effective groundwater divide."

Still, concerns about the area's complex groundwater system and the possibility that contaminants could seep into it were expressed by Chris Thompson, with the state's Department of Environment and Conservation.

Thompson said a system of "under drains" proposed near several landfill sites could be a "direct conduit of contaminants to groundwater." An earlier city-funded study included similar worries.

Cleanup work is now centered on the former K-25 site where uranium was once enriched. That sprawling tract is now called East Tennessee Technology Park, and the cleanup there is targeted to wrap up in 2020.

The existing landfill for K-25 debris is near Y-12 and about 70 percent full. It will be capped when the K-25 work is done, officials said.

Next up: the start of what's expected to be a 20-year chore to rid Y-12 — a nuclear weapons plant — and Oak Ridge National Laboratory of low-level radioactive debris as well as mercury.

That work is targeted to begin in 2024, and that cleanup should fill up the new, 2-million-cubic-foot landfill. DOE officials want to have the first two cells of a new landfill ready to use well beforehand.

Cange said the DOE hopes to recommend one of those four sites as the preferred location later this year, and Wednesday's session was a prelude to a mandatory public comment period on the DOE's choice.

A final decision on a landfill location would be made next year; the project would be in the design phase for 2018-2019; and construction of the initial two landfill cells is penciled in for 2020-2022.

Wednesday's get-together, described as a prelude to the formal public comment period, was hosted by the Energy, Technology and Environmental Business Association, a nonprofit consortium of 130 companies that are mainly DOE contractors.

Feds estimates LANL cleanup at $1 billion less than state

Santa Fe New Mexican

July 28, 2016

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates the cost of cleaning up 70 years of legacy waste from Cold War-era nuclear weapons production at about $1 billion less than estimates provided by state officials earlier this year.

In March, New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ryan Flynn said the two decades of soil and water remediation and waste removal would cost at least $4 billion, or $255 million per year.

But Doug Hintze, manager of the Energy Department's Environmental Management Los Alamos Field Office, said this week that an average of $153 million per year, or $2.9 billion through 2035, would be sufficient.

State officials and nuclear watchdog groups disagree.

“DOE’s figure is entirely too optimistic,” said Allison Scott Majure, a spokeswoman for the state Environment Department. “Secretary Flynn has repeatedly advocated for a funding level of $255 million at the site, which will accelerate cleanup of DOE’s legacy waste and associated environmental restoration in and around Los Alamos. Even DOE’s own estimates prove this is justified in light of the remaining scope of the work.”

Jay Coghlan, director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, said in a statement that the federal cost estimate is not merely too low but also suggests “that the Lab’s major radioactive and toxic wastes dumps will not be cleaned up.”

The lower price point, he said, indicates the Energy Department plans to “cap and cover” the estimated 200,000 cubic yards of toxic waste at sites atop Los Alamos mesas rather than move it to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad or another secure facility.

The “so-called cleanup … leaves tons of radioactive and toxic wastes in the ground that will permanently threaten Northern New Mexico’s precious water resources,” Coghlan said.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico has been critical of both the Energy Department and the state Environment Department over delays in cleanup at Los Alamos. The organization filed a recent lawsuit against the lab and its federal regulators over an agreement with the state that governs the lab’s cleanup activities.

But Greg Mello, director of the Los Alamos Study Group, another watchdog group, said the disparity between state and federal lab cleanup estimates signals different mindsets and expectations.

While the federal government may be eager to put cleanup responsibilities behind, the state likely would benefit from the increased funding that more rigorous cleanup efforts would bring.

“Los Alamos is always going to be contaminated, and I am not sure that all parties are clear about that,” Mello said.

The lab continues to generate new nuclear waste, he said, citing plans to restart plutonium pit production this year in Los Alamos. “The problem, as it is posed right now, is unending,” Mello said.